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# HARVARD THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

VOLUME X

JANUARY, 1917

NUMBER 1

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## QUIETISM

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It has been too much the custom to treat Quietism as a sporadic type of religion, as a sort of capricious "sport," to use a familiar botanical term, expressing itself in two or three famous, but solitary and isolated, mystics on the continent of Europe, and to assume that later evidences of Quietism must be traced back to the teachings of these few rare expounders of it. I am convinced, on the contrary, that these select individuals were only luminous examples of a profound religious tendency, which, in varying form of expression, swept over the entire western world in the latter part of the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth centuries, flooded into the consciousness of all who were intensely religious, and left an "unimaginable touch" even on the rank and file of believers. It was a deep and widespread movement, confined to no one country and it was limited to no one branch of the Christian Church. It burst forth in sun-dered places and spread like a new Pentecost, through kindled personalities and through quick and powerful books of genius.

Quietism was the most acute and intense stage of European mysticism. It was not a wholly new type of inward religion. It was rather a result of the normal ripening, the irresistible maturing, of experiences, ideas,

and principles that had been profoundly working for a very long period in the religious consciousness of Europe—a fact which partly explains its seemingly spontaneous appearance in a number of widely separated localities. It was an intense and glowing faith in the direct invasion of God into the sphere of human personality—a faith rising in many cases to the level of indubitable experience—but a faith, at the same time, indissolubly bound up with a fundamental conception of man's total depravity and spiritual bankruptcy. It must be understood at the outset that Quietism does not spell lethargy and inaction; it does not mean folded hands and a little more sleep; it is not a religion for lotus-eaters. The Quietist may and often did, swing out into a course of action that would make the rationally centred Christian quail with fear and slink to cover. It is not a question of action or of non-action; it is a question of *the right way to initiate action*. The Quietist holds a peculiar view in reference to the kind of spring, incentive, or "motor-cue" that can inaugurate a spiritual act. For him all acts that are motived by human consciousness, all aims designed, arranged, and planned by reason and the will of man, bear the mark and brand of the "creature" and are below the sphere of the spiritual. All thoughts and strivings that originate in mere man are spiritually barren and unfruitful. There are two levels or storeys to the universe. One level is the realm of "nature," which has passed through a moral catastrophe that broke its inherent connection with the divine and so left it godless and ruined. The other level is the "supernatural" realm where God is throned in power and splendor as spiritual Ruler. Nothing spiritual can originate on the level of "nature"; it can come only from "yonder." The main problems of religion, on this theory, are problems concerning the way in which the chasm is spanned between these two divided, sundered realms.

Quietism has its own peculiar answer to this urgent question. It had its birth and its nurture in the absolute despair of human nature which Protestant theology and the Counter-Reformation had greatly intensified. It flourished on an extreme form of the doctrine of the ruin and fall of man—an utter miserabilism of the “creature.” The trail of the old Adam lies over all that man does or thinks. The taint of the “creature” spoils all that springs from this source and fountain. Nothing divine, nothing that has religious value, can originate in man as man. The true and essential preparation therefore for spiritual ministry or for any action in the truth and life, seemed to the Quietist to be the repose of all one’s own powers, the absence of all efforts of self-direction, of all strain and striving, the annihilation of all confidence in one’s own capacities, the complete quiet of the “creature.” Then out of this silence of all flesh, out of this calm of contemplation, in which the mind thinks and desires and wills nothing—this pure repose—divine movings will spontaneously come, the extraordinary grace of openings will be made, an inner burst of revelation will be granted, the sure direction of divine pointings will be given, a spiritual fecundity will be graciously vouchsafed. Passivity and emptiness are thus only conditions of divine moving; they are only stages on the way to action. And the Quietist may become, without any violation of his principle, a hundred-horse-power man of deeds.

What I have been calling the state of “passivity” and “emptiness” needs further comment and elucidation. “Passivity,” of the effective sort, might better be called concentration or absorption. It is a state of inner life in which all the powers and functions of consciousness are brought into complete focal unity, so that all dualisms of self and other vanish, all tendencies to scatter disappear, all vagrant suggestions and inhibitions are absent.

The soul is unified, intensified, fused, penetrated, and *stands absolutely on attention*. The Quietist believed that this state was reached by a single act, a mighty act, and when once this state was reached, the soul became a living centre of receptivity. We speak here of quietude, repose, passivity; but it would appear that at no other time and under no other conditions is there such intense spiritual *action*. There is such complete concentration, such unmixed absorption, such undivided inner unity, that the mind takes no note of its own processes and does not reflect upon its intent or content. Von Hügel very aptly says that the absence of the direct consciousness of the self and of what is happening within is a characteristic of the deepest and most creative moments, and this is true whether the action is confined to the inward or outward sphere. "The degree of mind or will-force," he says, "operating in Nelson at Trafalgar and in Napoleon at Waterloo, or again in St. Ignatius of Antioch in the Amphitheatre, and in Savonarola at the stake, was evidently in the precisely contrary ratio to their direct consciousness of it or of themselves at all."<sup>1</sup>

The primary aspirations and the profoundest travail of soul of those who set forth on this spiritual pilgrimage are for the crucifixion of self and the death of the "creature," and the goal of the pilgrimage is the attainment of a state of *pure* repose and contemplation in which God flows in and takes the place of the crucified me, becomes the only inward reality, and inaugurates whatever action is acceptable to His perfect and holy will. The highest spiritual state, on whatever path the soul is travelling, is to the Quietist always "pure," i.e. it is a state uncontaminated by any definite mental content. "Pure love," which is love in its consummation, is a love that loves nothing finite or particular. All selfishness is purged away and it seeks no return. It loves for

<sup>1</sup> The Mystical Element of Religion, Vol. II, p. 133.

the sake of love alone. "Pure faith," which is faith at the *n*th degree, is a concentrated, unalloyed, and intense assent or swing of soul to God without the content and filling of any definite ideas or beliefs or expectations. "Pure prayer," which is prayer at its real efficacious level, is an absorbed and unitive state, in which not only all selfish thoughts and desires are obliterated but all thoughts and desires of every description are banished. The soul and God have met, and all of self is hushed as His presence flows in and bathes the soul with the fountains of Life.

This extreme form of religious mysticism, which culminated in the teachings of Molinos, Guyon, and Fénelon, was already current, even in England, before Madame Guyon was born, and it was a waxing influence for more than half a century. It is clearly described in Jeremy Taylor's *Life of Christ*, which was first published in 1649. "Beyond this [type of meditation] I have described," he writes, "there is a degree of meditation so exalted that it changes the very name, and is called contemplation. It is in the unitive way of religion, that is, it consists in unions and adherences to God; it is a prayer of quietness and silence, a meditation extraordinary, *a discourse without variety*, a vision and intuition of divine excellences, an immediate entry into an orb of light, and a resolution of all our faculties into sweetness, affections, and starings upon the divine beauty."<sup>2</sup> His further description of the way to this state of pure contemplation is a very happy attempt to express that which passes expression—that which, as he says, is "not to be discoursed of but felt." "When persons have been long softened with the continual droppings of religion, and their spirits made timorous [i.e. sensitive] and apt for impression by the assiduity of prayer and perpetual alarms of death and the continual dyings of mortification;

<sup>2</sup> Taylor's *Life of Christ* (Edition of 1850, London), Vol. II, p. 139.

the fancy [i.e. creative imagination], which is a very great instrument of devotion, is kept continually warm, and in a disposition and aptitude to take fire *and to flame out into great ascents.*"<sup>3</sup>

Another famous Englishman of the sixteenth century, who taught and practised interior or wordless prayer, was John Hales—often called “the ever-memorable Mr. John Hales of Eton” (b. 1584). In his *Golden Remains* he says of prayer:

“Nay, one thing I know more, that the prayer which is the most forcible transcends and far exceeds all power of words. For St. Paul, speaking unto us of the most effectual kind of prayer, calls it sighs and groans that cannot be expressed. Nothing cries so loud in the ears of God as the sighing of a contrite and earnest heart. . . . It requires not the voice but the mind; not the stretching of the hands but the intention of the heart; not any outward shape or carriage of the body but the inward behavior of the understanding. How then can it slacken your worldly business and occasions to mix them with sighs and groans, which are the most effectual prayer?”

This is not yet fully developed Quietism, and the characteristic terminology and the sacred phrases of the later exponents are not yet coined. But the quietistic tendency is here obvious, and the set of the current is strongly indicated. The great continental movement itself—the apotheosis of Quietism—which we must now study in some detail, was only the fearless and unrestrained expansion and fulfilment of what was implicit in the mysticism of the preceding century, especially in the mysticism of the Counter-Reformation in Roman Catholic countries. As a matter of fact, Quietism was implicit not only in the mysticism of the Counter-Reformation but in all Christian mysticism which shows a strong Neoplatonic strain. It is quite easy to find it in St. Augustine; indeed, his doctrine of grace and his view of man furnish the very ground and basis for fully developed

<sup>3</sup> Taylor's Life of Christ (Edition of 1850, London), Vol. II, p. 140.

**Quietism.** Thomas à Kempis, in his *Imitation of Christ*, is a master expert both in the language of Quietism and in the thing itself. The influence of this book in England was beyond question one of the direct sources of English Quietism in the seventeenth century. The other St. Thomas—Thomas Aquinas—who laid, deep and solid, the foundations for so many phases of spiritual thought, has much to say both of the unitive, concentrated consciousness of inner quiet and also of that perfect love which “clings to God for His own sake,” with “no thought of any good thing that may accrue from it.”

The great names in the directly influential mystical movement of the Counter-Reformation are St. Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), who is known in history as the founder of the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, rather than as the great mystic which he was; St. Teresa (1515–1582), the greatest of the group; St. John of the Cross (1542–1591); St. Francis de Sales (1567–1622); St. Jeanne Françoise de Chantal (1572–1642); and St. Vincent de Paul (1576–1660).

“Stout Cortes,” fighting his way over barren stretches of ocean, through strange jungles inhabited by fierce beasts and fiercer men, to a new and seemingly limitless ocean on which he gazed, “silent, upon a peak in Darien,” was not stouter of heart or bolder of spirit than were these contemporaries of his who explored the uncharted and unfathomable seas within themselves and tracked their way through still stranger jungles in the human heart to the shoreless Sea whose tides seemed to surge into their channels.

This movement constitutes, without question, one of the most important chapters in religious history. Here one may see the human spirit on its most steep and difficult pilgrimage, its most dizzy and daring ascents, braving darkness and loneliness and silence and cross on its secret way to God. Like Abraham, these children

of faith went out, not knowing whither they went, risking absolutely everything in time and eternity on their quest, which was total absorption in God, the annihilation of self, the substitution of divine action for action directed by human will, and the attainment of a perfect and selfless love.

No other experts in the mystical way of any epoch have given us more keen and exhaustive analyses of the steps, the stages, the processes, of the deadly war with self, of the total eclipse of all that is "me" or "mine," of the dark night of the soul, than these great spiritual geniuses of the sixteenth century have given in their books; nor have heroic souls ever been less daunted by suffering and crucifixion than were these tremendous lovers of the suffering Christ.

They were more sane and robust and well-balanced than their successors, the Quietists in the seventeenth century; but the latter movement was undoubtedly the offspring of the earlier one, and though marked by a changed emphasis and a new emotional tone, Quietism drew its terminology, its stock of ideas, its methods, its practices, and the model of its characteristic experiences from the great mystics of the Counter-Reformation, especially from Teresa, John of the Cross, and Francis de Sales. Before the word "Quietism" came into use and before ecclesiastics on the watch-tower perceived the rising storm, these earlier mystical writers had been "building all inward," and had been exalting the "empty," "motionless" inner state, the will that "wills nothing," the "one single act," which brings "irresistible grace" into operation within the soul.

Sporadic groups of persons, claiming divine illumination and making use of silence and passive orison to promote the union of the soul with God, appeared through the first half of the seventeenth century both in Spain and Italy and, as we have seen, in England. The

Spanish mystic, Juan Falconi (1596–1638), a member of the Order of “Our Lady of Mercy,” a passionately devout soul, saturated with the teachings of the mystics, was one of the early exponents of Quietism who deeply influenced the movement in Spain, Italy, and France. An important letter on silent interior prayer was written by him in 1628. It was printed in Spain in 1657, and was shortly after translated into Italian and very widely circulated in Italy, and a little later was put into French and read throughout France.<sup>4</sup> Falconi thinks but little of “*sensible* divine operations,” i.e. operations which give a definite content to the mind. He urges his reader to rise above these lower stages and settle herself into the presence of God by an interior act of faith which abandons everything of self, for time and for eternity. “Dwell in silence. Think of nothing, however good, however sublime it may be. Dwell only in pure faith in God and in utter resignation to his holy will.”<sup>5</sup> In the prayer of interior silence in which the soul is absolutely abandoned to the will of God and in which it knows not what it does, it finds itself advancing and being established in faith without knowing how. The great virtues form in the soul and grow there by interior operations that are beyond knowledge. The soul is prospering best when it has no definite and limiting ideas of God present in consciousness, and it should not disturb itself with thinking whether it shall put its virtues into practice or not. This concern belongs in a lower stage of the spiritual life. All effort, all interior exercise, all sensible operations, all dependence on mental faculties, only disturb the real divine operation.<sup>6</sup> “Sink yourself into naked, obscure [i.e. “pure”] faith in God and let yourself be annihilated in this divine abyss.”<sup>7</sup>

By the middle of the century a sect known as the

<sup>4</sup> It was printed at the end of Madame Guyon’s *Moyen Court* of 1690, and is in the first volume of her *Opuscules Spirituels* (1704).

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 105–106.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 108.

Society of the Pelagini, from its founder Giacomo Filippo di Santa Pelagia, a layman of Milan, became widespread in Northern Italy. The members of these little societies met together for silent mental prayer, which they considered essential to salvation. They believed that they had found the only true way to God, and that having found the efficacy of the inner way they could safely dispense with the services of the ordained priests and with the requirements of the Church. Bishop Burnet of England, who was himself a man possessed of deep inward religious life and who followed with the keenest interest the stages of the quietistic drama on the continent, wrote from Italy that the Quietists were observed to be "more strict in their lives" and "more retired and serious in their mental devotions" than other Christians, though, he adds, "they were not so assiduous at mass nor so earnest to procure masses to be said for their friends," and he makes the further comment that "the trade of those that live by these things was sensibly sunk."<sup>8</sup> The Inquisition set its forces in motion to annihilate the "heresy," but it continued to spread in secret and subterranean ways through the cities of northern Italy for almost a quarter of a century, and a very large number of persons became accustomed to and fascinated with the practice of silence.

This practice of silence and the full significance of quietistic tendencies came impressively to public attention in the seventies through the teachings and writings of a remarkable spiritual expert named Miguel de Molinos. He was born in Spain about 1627, received the degree of doctor of theology at Coimbra, and came to Rome sometime about 1665. He was deeply versed in mystical literature, profoundly influenced by the writings of Teresa, John of the Cross, and Francis de Sales, and already in this early stage dedicated to his

<sup>8</sup> Burnet's Three Letters Concerning the Present State of Italy, 1688.

peculiar mission of inculcating the way of silence. He very soon became the most noted and widely sought religious guide in Italy, and he found himself the centre of a great spiritual revival, which was due not merely to his personal qualities but rather to the fact that he gave powerful expression to a tendency already well under way around him. Pope Innocent XI—the Pope of Browning's "*The Ring and the Book*"—was intimately attached to him and gave him apartments in the papal palace. Persons of the highest rank and "honorable women not a few" sought for his spiritual direction.<sup>9</sup> Bishop Burnet, in his *Letters from Italy*, says, "It is believed he hath above 20,000 followers in Naples alone." His popularity was extraordinary even before he published his famous *Guida Spirituale* ("Spiritual Guide"), which appeared in Rome in 1675, and which went through twenty editions in many languages during the next six years. This book came from the press with the approbation of five distinguished theologians of the time, representing the Orders of the Franciscans, Trinitarians, Jesuits, Carmelites, and Capuchins, four of them being also censors of the Inquisition.

We must turn now to the little book itself to see what Italian Quietism, as expressed by its most famous exponent, really was. Molinos declares in his preface that God is always communicating new light by continuous revelation to mankind. His infinite wisdom is never exhausted, human souls continually need fresh instruction, and so there will be new spiritual books to the end of the world. And in this endless list of new spiritual books his book is one which he believes God has inspired and called for.

In the introduction, Molinos describes the two principal states or stages of spiritual life, the first of which many

<sup>9</sup> It is said that twenty thousand letters of consultation were found in his apartments on the day of his arrest.

attain; the second only few, because the way is very strait. The first stage is *meditation*, the second, *contemplation*. In meditation reason is operative, the attention is fixed upon the central truths of Christianity, the mind is busy with the mysteries of faith, the will grapples with doubts, and all the faculties of the inner self are employed in the effort to make faith and truth triumph over doubt and error. Contemplation is on a wholly different level. It does not begin until sense and intellect are left behind; until the soul has retired into its centre; until there is complete absence of thought, ideas, truths, images, all focussing of consciousness on distinct and particular objects; until effort and struggle of will have absolutely ceased and the soul enters perfect repose and peace, desiring nothing, seeking nothing, fearing nothing, resting calm and secure in pure faith, unselfish love, and wordless prayer. The soul is now full of joy, but knows not why; burns with love, but comprehends not how it loves.<sup>10</sup> There is but one castle to which the soul can flee for escape from the storm and din and warfare and defeats of the world and where it can triumph over all enemies that beset it, and that is the inner castle, the interior fortress of peace, which no assaults can disturb.<sup>11</sup>

He calls for a retreat from the world, a resignation, an indifference, an *ataraxy*, that in stoic temper far outdoes the boldest of the ancient Stoics. The soul must learn to do without any form of sensuous enjoyment whatever, without any tokens of divine favor or of divine love, without any raptures or ecstasies or visions, without the slightest sign that its passion and sufferings are appreciated:

<sup>10</sup> The Spiritual Guide; Introduction, Observation II.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Chap. I. There is a very interesting passage in John Woolman's Journal, in which precisely the same view of prayer is expressed: "The place of prayer is a precious habitation. . . . I saw this habitation to be safe—to be inwardly quiet, when there were great stirrings and commotions in the world." Journal (Whittier's Edition), p. 236.

"Thou wilt experience not only that the creatures will forsake thee and those from whom thou hadst hoped most, but even the brooks of thy faculties will dry up so that thou canst not think—not even so much as to conceive a good thought of God. Heaven will seem to thee to be of brass and thou shalt receive no light from above.<sup>12</sup> . . . The soul must learn to walk in dark and desert paths, dead to passions, dead to desires, dead to reflections, accustomed to dryness and aridity of spirit, enduring crucifixion and annihilation of self-love and self-will without wincing or even asking why, 'until no news makes it afraid and no success makes it glad.' The soul must attain an annihilation of its own judgment, its own will, its own works, its inclinations, desires, thoughts, so that it finds itself dead to its own will, desire, endeavor, understanding, and thought; willing as if it did not will; desiring as if it did not desire; understanding as if it did not understand; thinking as if it did not think; without inclining to anything; embracing equally contempts and honors, benefits and corrections."<sup>13</sup>

There are two kinds of prayer; the one tender, delightful, joy-bringing, and full of sensuous comfort; the other obscure, dry, desolate, without response or joy. The first is for children, the second is for strong men. There are also two degrees of silence; the one a silence of words and requests; the other an absolute silence of thoughts and of all self-activity. It is only in this second stage of prayer and of silence that the Holy Spirit operates unhindered. It is only when there is total nakedness of self, complete death of self-activity, that the divine Presence is infused and works without disturbance or disquiet. Molinos insists, in the very words which Madame de Chantal had already used, that God will have all things done by the operation of His own activity, and that therefore the quieter *I* keep the better all things succeed.<sup>14</sup> As love mounts, self falls, so that perfect love is utter annihilation of self, which is the only true miracle of sainthood.<sup>15</sup>

Strange as it may seem to a generation accustomed to

<sup>12</sup> The Spiritual Guide, Part I, Chap. VIII.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Part II, Chap. XIX.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Part I, Chap. XIII.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Part II, Chap. VII.

hedonistic theories of life, this passionate stoic message, this call to retreat to a depth of silence below the silence of words, this gospel of unrestrained self-crucifixion, came to men's ears with a mysterious fascination and spoke to their condition like a new revelation. But its very success was its defeat. So long as it remained an abstract theory it did not much matter, but when it was translated into life and *marched* in practice, its dangerous import, from the point of view of the Church, was obvious. Its disciples—and they were very numerous—discontinued the use of the rosary and even vocal prayer, gave up confession, discounted the value of all external performances and exterior acts, and plainly showed a tendency to get on without the aid of priests or of the vast and expensive machinery of the Church. If God could be met in the silence of the interior retreat, what function is left for a priest, and if salvation was a matter of self-annihilation, how can the Church promote it? Was not this proclamation of the inner way to God, then, a preparation for a Protestantism in the south, as Luther's proclamation of salvation by faith had been for the north? Some of these Quietists, even the most spiritual and devoted ones, believed and taught that one single act of concentrated interior faith, one undivided assent of soul to the will of God, with no reservations and with no desires for self, one supreme act of pure devotion and prayer, would bring grace into operation in the soul so superlatively and effectively that it would continue through all the rest of time and eternity, like that water which the Samaritan woman sought, that she might not need henceforth to draw more. The guardians of orthodoxy saw the danger and determined to stamp out the movement, though the sympathetic heart of the Pope was with the new piety and with the man who had revived an intenser faith.

The story of the crusade for the extirpation of Italian

Quietism and the details of the process of hushing Molinos in the absolute silence of the Inquisition's solitary cell cannot be told here. The work was done by that force which "strikes once and strikes no more," and the danger of a new reformation by mysticism in Italian and Spanish countries was passed! Among the charges levelled against Molinos, including sixty-eight errors in doctrine, there were still graver charges of immoral practice. He was said by his inquisitors to have confessed to the view that it was possible for a soul in union with God to perform bodily acts of an apparently immoral nature, but yet without the consent of the spirit and so without any moral taint. He was further said to have confessed that he himself had committed improper acts, not suitable for repetition, but that as they were acts of his body, to which his higher faculties in union with God did not consent, they were not sinful acts.

These confessions rest solely on the assertion of inquisitors who were bent on making a case and who had at their command methods of torture which often wrung answers from the lips of their victims, though the words were denied as soon as the quivering flesh was released. The actual truth in this matter can never be settled, though I am inclined to distrust the moral charges against Molinos. But there can be no doubt that this extreme tendency of his to centre religion in an experience above distinctions was then and always must be a dangerous tendency. The moment "distinctions" are transcended on a level beyond good and evil, whether by Molinos or by Nietzsche, the very basis of morality has vanished, because the very life of morality rests upon a clear vision of distinction between higher and lower ethical issues, and upon a positive focussing of moral purpose and a definite choice of ends. No way of retreat to an inner citadel of peace, where the problems of the complicated world are transcended and where all acts become "in-

different," can be a way of genuine spiritual victory, and when the inner peace is won by the method of retreat, the lower instincts and passions, left without the guidance and direction of a sanctified intelligence, are only too likely to come into operation.

This stoical Quietism of Molinos, which looks so hard and stern toward the self, which seems in fact one long Golgotha of self-crucifixion, turns out psychologically to be a way beset with moral dangers and a way, after all, that misses the slow formation of a robust and virile sainthood. His panegyric on "Nothingness" is impressive in its note of simplicity and humility of spirit, but taken literally it cuts the central nerve of the spiritual life. "Look at Nothing, will Nothing, endeavor after Nothing; and then in everything thy soul will live reposed with quiet." "Plunge into Nothing, and there thou shalt find a holy Sanctuary against any tempest whatsoever."<sup>16</sup>

The merciless attack on Molinos led the Church on, by a natural logic, to a break with mysticism as a way of salvation and to a far greater emphasis upon the necessity of using the sacred channels of grace under the direction of the authoritative hierarchy. The persons who were attached to Molinos, or who were devoted to interior prayer, were hunted down throughout Spain and Italy, and the newer books that taught this inner way to God were as far as possible suppressed, including the writings of Juan Falconi. Among those who were caught in the great drag-net of the Argus-eyed inquisition was a blind mystic of Marseilles who was one of the early interpreters of Quietism in France, plainly a product of the Spanish-Italian movement. This was François Malaval, a refined and beautiful spirit and a man of true literary power. He was born in 1627 and lost his sight while still a child in the cradle, but by the assistance of

<sup>16</sup> The Spiritual Guide, Part II, Chap. XX.

readers he received a classical education, and became possessed of an extensive acquaintance with mystical literature. Cut off from the beauty of the external creation, he set himself more and more to the task of exploring the inner world. After the prevailing manner of his time, he became fascinated with the quiet of the central depth within. He was a voluminous writer, though much which he wrote failed to get into print, but an extensive account of what he believed to be the true spiritual way was published in 1670 with the title, *La Pratique de la vraie theologie mystique*.

It is full of passages of fine psychological and spiritual insight, but its main message is an extreme form of Quietism. The soul must pass beyond visions and ecstasies, beyond words and sights, beyond thoughts and desires, beyond meditations even of Jesus Christ and His truth, and attain a pure, unitive state of consciousness, a pure love which is satisfied with loving, a hush of all voices, outer and inner, in which the soul penetrates beyond surface and husk, and flows into indistinguishable union with God. This book was put on the Index in 1688 and Malaval retracted the errors that were proscribed in his teaching, but even his letter of retraction was put on the Index as dangerous reading for the faithful. His book was, however, widely read in France and received Bossuet's condemnation in 1695, but in spite of this attack was republished in two volumes in 1709.

Another early interpreter of Quietism in France was Desmarests Saint-Sorlin, whose teachings are fiercely attacked and refuted in Nicole's rare book *Les Visionnaires* of 1667. This broadside of Nicole's against the "new heresies" plainly reveals the fact of a large quietistic movement in France and indicates the existence of groups of persons who claimed inward enlightenment, divine inspiration, and freedom to interpret the Scriptures in accordance with their inward Light, and who by the

way of interior silence expected to come into extraordinary union with God.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most famous, and certainly one of the most interesting, of the minor prophets of Quietism was the Flemish mystic, Antoinette Bourignon. She was born in Lille in 1616, a precocious child in intellect and in religious insight, though physically deformed and marked throughout her youth by strange moods. She inflicted ascetic tortures upon herself, had unspeakable raptures, enjoyed visions, heard voices, and finally received a "call" to "restore to the world the gospel-spirit," and she was told that she was created to guide men into a life like the first Christians and to make righteousness shine forth.<sup>18</sup>

The capricious and serio-comic incidents that make up the strange story of her formative years cannot be detailed in this brief sketch of her career. It would be difficult to find a more peculiar "saint," or a more bizarre "prophetess," or a more absurd claimant to the gift of infallible inspiration, and yet with all her oddities she was at her best and highest a wonderful instrument of spiritual revelation. She exercised extraordinary influence not only over the simple-minded and childlike, but also over persons of solid scholarship and rare gifts, the most noted of whom was the great educational genius, Comenius, who said of her: "Oh holy maid! Would that I might see her and speak with her once more! My science and knowledge and the books which I have written are the fruit of human argument and reason; but she has gained all her wisdom directly by the working of God's Holy Spirit."<sup>19</sup> Of others who appreciated

<sup>17</sup> Fénelon, in a letter of March 18, 1702, speaks of "many books on pure love" in general circulation. Heinrich Heppe in his *Geschichte der quietistischen Mystik* (Berlin, 1875) gives a large amount of valuable material for the study of the less well-known Quietists.

<sup>18</sup> *Sa Vie Extérieure par elle-même*, and *Sa Vie Continuée par Pierre Poiret* give much interesting biographical material.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted from A. R. MacEwen's *Antoinette Bourignon* (London, 1910), p. 75.

her spiritual guidance and felt her power the most significant were Jean de Labadie and Pierre Poiret. Like her greater Quietist sister, Madame Guyon, she believed that God had endowed her with "a principle of fecundity" and had commissioned her to do a great work of "spiritual maternity" in the world and to bring forth through suffering and the agony of birth-pains many "spiritual children."

Antoinette claims not to have learned from books, to be ignorant of human science, and to have "received" inwardly by inspiration, or rather by dictation, all that she knows, but her writings show large familiarity with the great and lesser mystics and she was evidently quick to select and absorb any suggestion or truth which fitted her body of ideas. She was apparently independent of the later Spanish movement and she is therefore an interesting parallel development of experiences and ideas, initiated primarily by the common influence of the master mystics of earlier times. She distinctly held the Augustinian conception of grace which comes immediately from God and which does everything for man's salvation when once he discovers that he has "nothing of his own." When all the faculties of the soul "lie still," the soul can receive "the pure light of the Holy Spirit." "Resignation" is the magic word. It means absence of all desires, abolition of preference, total dependence on God's disposing will, freedom from creaturely affections, and a merely passive and receptive attitude. "Resignation consists," she wrote, "in a cessation from all things, that we may receive God only. There needs no more than *to cease* and *to receive*; for all our cares and vexations or activities for things of this life are hindrances which stifle the operations which God would cause in our soul. We must be quiet and rest, that we may suffer the Holy Spirit to act alone."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> MacEwen, op. cit., p. 108.

She was a voluminous writer — far too voluminous — her collected writings making nineteen volumes (Amsterdam, 1679–1684). Her writings began to appear in English as early as 1671, and for more than a quarter of a century this strange Quietist carried on her work of “spiritual maternity” among a people whom she never saw. Her opponents thought she was a Quaker; the Scottish Assembly required all schoolmasters, tutors, and chaplains to sign a confession of faith disowning “the dangerous errors of Bourignonism”; but still she went on winning “spiritual children” and spreading the mood of repose and disseminating quietistic ideas.<sup>21</sup>

Before turning to the classical French interpreters of the movement, it will be instructive to examine its characteristic popular features as they appear in the experiences and ideas of two simple-minded and unlearned exponents of it. The mystics who have supplied us with material for the study of mysticism have been almost entirely mystics with a literary gift. Those who had no skill for psychological analysis and no biographical power to present their inward life may have influenced their little local circles while they lived but they have now no place in the line of torch-bearers, and we are too apt to assume that there were no mystics except those who wrote journals and books. As a matter of fact, the literary mystics form only a tiny fraction of those who had the great experiences, those whose eyes saw, whose ears heard, and whose hands handled.

Armelle Nicolas, a poor French servant girl of Brittany, who could neither read nor write, furnishes a remarkable illustration of the unexpected breaking forth of this type of religion in an untaught person, and it is only by

<sup>21</sup> The most important of her “englished” writings are: *The Light of the World* (London, 1696); *Treatise of Solid Virtue* (1699); *Light Risen in Darkness* (1703); and *The Renovation of the Spirit* (1707).

accident that we know her story.<sup>22</sup> Armelle was born in 1606. As a child she tended her mother's sheep in the fields, and at a very early age she was "inclined to silence and solitude." She had in these early years "infusions of sweetness and tenderness," moments of divine invasion, when God seemed present instructing her in the way of life, and from the very first she was profoundly touched by the suffering love of Christ and by a desire to bear His cross herself. Then came, as happens with all who travel the road of Quietism, a dark period of "stunning trials," both in the outer and inner sphere. Not only did the world fail her, but God seemed to retire and leave her to herself in grievous and insupportable anguish, facing the possible loss of everlasting happiness. Finally, one day in the fields, when all hope seemed gone, the love of God flowed round her, embraced her soul, filled her with unutterable joy, and created in her a passion to live henceforth to God alone. She set herself to the work of annihilating the creature, of killing self, and of eliminating everything in her nature which hindered God from acting in His own way through her. Pain, disease, suffering, came upon her in abundant measure, but she discovered that "it is better to suffer for love than to enjoy love," and she learned that she could continue in silent union with God as completely while working or suffering as she could formerly while partaking of the holy communion, which seemed at that time indispensable to her. Her ordinary meals became glorified by the real presence and "each morsel she ate seemed dipped in Christ's precious blood." In the bustles and hurries and hard labors of her daily pursuits she often felt the divine Light flood in and the holy presence touch her. Very often she seemed to feel another Hand guide her

<sup>22</sup> The story of her experiences was written by a religious sister, in two duodecimo volumes of 550 and 350 pages. An admirable summary of this work was made for the use of Friends by James Gough and published in Bristol in 1772.

hand, and she sometimes learned more in one day than men of the world could have taught her in a year.<sup>23</sup> "I am," she said, "never less alone than when I seem most alone." Silence seemed to her the most precious and efficacious way to union with God. The soul must cease its converse with all that is of the creature, must give up its eagerness for the news of this world, and learn to *centre itself within* in absolute quiet. So amply did this poor, simple girl partake of and practise the divine presence that the Sister, who tells her story, declares that there was something so divine and heavenly in her countenance and carriage that many used to say that, if they had no belief in God before, beholding the face of Armelle would have been enough to convince them that there is a God.

Nicholas Herman of Lorraine, a lay-brother of the Barefooted Carmelites and popularly known as "Brother Lawrence," is my other illustration of Quietism among the unlearned. He was born about 1610, served in the great world first as a soldier and then as a footman, and afterwards served in the little world of the brotherhood as kitchen-servant. He shows far more direct contact with the great exponents of Quietism than does Armelle Nicolas and he uses the technical terminology to a much greater extent than she does.<sup>24</sup> The existing material for a study of Brother Lawrence consists of sixteen short *Letters* by himself, a short collection of *Spiritual Maxims* embodying his views, four *Conversations*, probably written down by M. Beaufort and a brief *Life*, apparently

<sup>23</sup> This is a common expression of the mystics and indicates her acquaintance directly or indirectly with mystical writings. Brother Lawrence uses the more common phrase to express his experience. He says, "By faith I learn more of God, and in a little time, than I could do in the schools in many a long year."

<sup>24</sup> It is certain that Fénelon and Brother Lawrence knew each other. In the little sketch of Brother Lawrence (written probably by M. Beaufort, Grand Vicar to Cardinal de Noailles) reference is made to a visit which Fénelon made to Brother Lawrence during the latter's illness. Brother Lawrence also frequently refers in his letters to books which teach the method of prayer and the way to practise the presence of God, and he tells of other Brothers who have attained higher experiences than he has.

from the same hand. There is in everything that has come from Brother Lawrence a naïve simplicity that is perfectly charming and one feels that he not only talks happily about practising the presence of God but that he really practises it. "The practice of the presence of God" means for him the attainment of a state of "indifference" toward all finite things, a retreat into the inmost centre of the soul, an experience of absolute repose and tranquillity of spirit, and then a consciousness of the actual presence of God flowing through all his being and giving him inspiration, power, and guidance in all his activities, even those that are most commonplace.

He began his preparation for this great experience, which eventually became a habit, by highly resolving to *give the all for the all*<sup>25</sup> by learning to do everything, even the turning of a griddle-cake, *purely for the love of God*, by forming the habit of calm silent repose and abandon, of caring only for God and nothing for matters that affected merely himself, and by acting on the faith that God is always present where the soul, created for Him, is emptied of other things and passionately eager to receive Him. Like all mystics of this school, he had periods of dryness and insensibility to pass through, when there was no *sign* of any presence given to him and when he had to practise his faith and wait for the divine tides to return, but through such experiences he cultivated his spirit of resignation and deepened the spiritual roots by which he lived, and in the course of time, like other Quietists, he ceased to be concerned about his "feelings," lost interest in the fluctuating states of his subjective "temperature," worried no longer about his salvation, gave up his desire for introspection, and lived in the unbroken practice of the divine presence. He found it

<sup>25</sup> First Letter. This is a well-known phrase in the writings both of Madame Guyon and of Fénelon.

unnecessary to be in a church or in the performance of religious ceremonies in order to be with God, for he discovered that he could make a sanctuary of his heart and have an intense and active union with God in his menial toil. Prayer became for him undisturbed and silent repose in God, dynamic and active, but marked by perfect *simplicity* and *pure* love.

So this good brother lived his eighty years, thoroughly human, rough, and awkward by nature, but made graceful and lovely by the work of God upon him, and slowly habituating his spirit, by faith and hope and love, to a perpetual practice of God's presence in his simple round of life; and "without any pain or struggle, without losing in the slightest the use of any of his faculties, he passed away in the embrace of his Lord," to be forever in the near presence of Him who had been the Life of his life. Many of his phrases are no doubt pregnant with the moral dangers that appear in such prolific measure in the fully developed stage of Quietism, but the simplicity and sanity and the joyous spirit of Brother Lawrence kept him in fine balance, prevented him from going all the way with his logic, and enabled him to live among the brotherhood with a shining face, with "a spaciousness of mind quite beyond the ordinary," and with his moral activities heightened rather than hampered by his quietistic views.

In France this movement found its most extraordinary expression—its prophetess, in fact—in Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Mothe Guyon, to whom we must now turn. She was born in the little town of Montargis, within easy reach of Paris, the 13th of April, 1648. She hovered between life and death for the first five weeks after her birth and continued frail and delicate and subject to recurrent illnesses throughout her infancy. The Bouvier de la Mothes were famous for their deep piety, "counting," Madame Guyon says, "almost as

many saints in the family tree as there were persons!"<sup>26</sup> and the frail little girl found herself born into an atmosphere of holy aspirations. At four years of age she loved to go to church, to dress as a nun, and to hear people talk about God, and she soon developed a passion for martyrdom. The first great religious upheaval of her life came to her when she was twelve years old through the chance visit to her home of a cousin, the Abbé de Toissy, who was on his way to Cochin-China as a missionary. She did not see him herself, but the mere story of the holiness and spiritual power of this missionary moved her so deeply that she wept the rest of the day and through the night, and this event was the occasion of her dedication to religion. She now discovered the writings of Francis de Sales and Madame de Chantal and by their help she learned to pray in silence, and in this stage of youthful imitation she endeavored to repeat the vows and the experiences of her model saint, Madame de Chantal.

Her nature was unusually intense, and in the period of adolescence a passion of love was born in her and swept through her entire being, but with all this wealth of love to bestow she found nobody on earth to love. A marriage was arranged for her by her father when she was fifteen, and this mystical, romantic child, made for love, was given to a dry and gouty gentleman twenty years older than herself, and sent to live in a home, dominated by a coarse, narrow-minded, cruel mother-in-law. The story of her sufferings in this dreary prison-home is a pitiful chapter, relieved, however, by the triumph of her spirit over the rude environment and by the way she used the daily crosses in the world about her to crucify herself and to refine her soul. Finding nothing around her to love, her love mounted like a burn-

<sup>26</sup> Autobiography of Madame Guyon, translated by Thomas Taylor Allen (London, 1898), Part I, Chap. II.

ing flame toward God—"I found in you, O my God, reasons for suffering which I have never found in the creature, and I saw with complaisance that this unreasonable and crucifying conduct was necessary for me."<sup>27</sup>

In her passionate search for a real and efficacious way to God, she found a succession of spiritual helpers, which shows how widespread in the France of this period were persons of mystical insight and experience. The first of her guides in the mystical way was the Duchess de Bethune-Charost, the daughter of Fouquet and an intimate friend of the Duke and Duchess of Beauvilliers, and the Duke and Duchess of Chevreuse, who formed an inner spiritual circle in the court of Louis XIV. "I saw in her," Madame Guyon writes of this lady, "something that showed a very great presence of God, and I remarked in her what I had never yet seen in any one. I endeavored, through my head and thoughts, to give myself a continual presence of God. I gave myself much trouble and made no advance. I wished to have by an effort what I could not acquire save in ceasing all effort."<sup>28</sup> The elder woman out of her experience tried to lead the younger one into the interior way and to instruct her in the use of silent prayer, but the latter was not yet quite prepared for the lesson nor was the teacher quite prepared to give it.

The return of her missionary cousin from Cochin-China, at this stage of her development, had a marked influence upon her life. She found that he prayed "in utter simplicity," that is to say, he prayed without words and without any definite thoughts or requests in his mind. His whole being was concentrated in worship, and the power of the divine attraction closed his mouth and hushed all processes of thought. She saw in him too

<sup>27</sup> Autobiography, Part II, Chap. VII.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Part II, Chap. VIII.

a union of puritan sternness toward the vanities of the world with radiant joy in God. Her friend, Geneviève Granger — a spiritual mother — who understood by a native instinct the experience and the language of the mystical missionary, helped her to gain a clearer insight. Thus God, seeing her “toiling with her rowing,” kept sending her favorable winds to assist her on her course. By what seemed the secret force of God’s own action, a Franciscan friar, a man with much of St. Francis’ own spirit, came to complete the conquest of her soul. She told him about her spiritual difficulties and failures. Instantly he said, “The trouble is that you are seeking outside for what you have within yourself. Seek God in your own heart and you will find him.” “I felt in that moment,” she writes, “a very deep wound, a wound so sweet and delicious that I desired never to be healed of it.” A simple turning of attention, under the guidance of this man, worked the miracle of her discovery:

“I no longer had any trouble to find God. From that moment I was given an experience of His presence in my central depth. I was all of a sudden so changed that I was no longer recognizable either by myself or others. I no longer found my old faults or my dislikes. All appeared to me consumed like straw in a great fire. Nothing was now more easy for me than to pray. Hours of prayer were to me no more than moments. I was unable not to pray. My prayer from this moment was without forms, ideas and images [i.e. of any definite thoughts]. It was not a prayer of the head; it was a prayer of enjoyment and possession in the will, *a profound concentration without act or speech*. All distinctions were lost to give room for more expansion, without motives or reasons for loving. That sovereign of the powers — the will — swallowed up the two others [intellect and desire] and took from them every distinct object to unite them the better in it.”<sup>29</sup>

Thus at the age of twenty, in the year 1668, Madame Guyon arrived, by what seemed to her a miraculous leap, at the first definite stage of her mystical journey. Like

<sup>29</sup> Autobiography, Part I, Chap. VIII. I have greatly condensed the account.

her spiritual teachers, the great mystics of the sixteenth century, she was impressed with the inferiority of visions, revelations, ecstasies, specific graces, distinct utterances, and sensible delights. The depth and centre of her soul seemed to her flooded, "by a continual influx," with the divine presence, without form or thought or image. Her faith, which absorbed her and conquered everything else, was "naked" and "pure," that is, it focussed upon no concrete facts or events or details. It mounted above distinctions to "a Light general, indistinct, undifferentiated, which appears darkness to the natural self on which it shines." Her prayer became a prayer of repose, of joy, and of possession. "I was plunged in a river of peace," says she; "I knew it was God who thus possessed all my soul, but I did not *think* on it, as a wife seated by her husband knows it is he who embraces her without saying to herself, 'It is he.'"<sup>30</sup>

Her passionate love which had before found no object now rose upward "like an interior conflagration and secret fire." At last she had discovered what the soul was created for—a profound and tranquil and absorbing love of God. "I loved Him, and I burned with His fire, because I loved Him in such a way that I could love only Him." With this awakening of love came also eagerness for suffering and positive joy in crosses.

"I said, O my Love, I wish to suffer for you; do not shorten my pains, for it would only be to shorten my pleasures. . . . Crosses which before this I had borne through resignation now became my delight. . . . I was not surprised at all that the martyrs gave their lives for Jesus Christ. I deemed them so happy, I envied their good fortune, and it was martyrdom for me that I could not suffer martyrdom!"

Like Dante, she discovered how it is that souls do not desire to get out of the pain and fire by which God is purifying them. Such souls "remain in peace quite

<sup>30</sup> Autobiography, Chap. XI.

passive in their sufferings, without wishing to shorten them.” Any process, however hard and painful, was welcome as a messenger of love, if only she could make it a way of annihilating “self,” and of abolishing everything that was merely her “own.” Senses, desires, intellect, will—all these were doomed to annihilation, but they proved to have a strange and subtle way of coming back in new guise.<sup>31</sup>

The period of this “first stage” lasted about six years—from 1668 to 1674. It was followed by another period—a terrible ordeal—of dryness and barrenness of soul, of stripping and despoiling of all that gave grace and beauty to life. She lost all sense of the divine presence of God, though in her first state it had seemed a permanent possession. She lost all power of prayer and “felt entirely void of God.” All joy in things, either outward or inward, vanished. She was overwhelmed with a feeling of unworthiness and with an appalling sense of desolation. The entire basis and essence of her nature now appeared to her impure and sinful and “lost.”

“Whenever I was alone,” she writes, “I shed torrents of tears, and I said with equal dryness and desolation, ‘Is it possible that I have received so many graces from God only to lose them; that I have loved Him with so much ardor only to hate Him eternally; that His benefits have served as matter for my ingratitude? His fidelity, shall it only be requited by my infidelity? Has my heart been so long filled with Him alone, only in order to be the more empty of Him; and has it been emptied of all created objects, only to be more strongly filled with them? On the other hand, I could not find pleasure in conversation, which I sought as if in spite of myself. I had within me an executioner, who tormented me without relaxation. I felt within me a pain that I could never make understood save by those who have experienced it.’<sup>32</sup>

Everything of self-nature, everything that belonged to “the creature,” or that bore the mark and brand of her

<sup>31</sup> This account of “the first stage” of her spiritual life is based on Chapters IX-XII of the Autobiography.

<sup>32</sup> Autobiography, Chap. XXI.

“ownership,” seemed base and despicable and hopeless. She was banished from her own “central depth,” and, like Noah’s dove, could find rest and peace nowhere. The wrath of God seemed to envelop her and often made her actually crouch on the floor. “The killing pain,” she wrote to Fénelon some years later, “which one feels when one loses the definite consciousness of the divine presence shows that one has not yet become perfectly *indifferent* and that one is still tied to *gifts* of God.”<sup>33</sup> During this time of inward desolation and death she was passing through a series of outward events and happenings such as few persons of flesh and blood could have gone through and lived. She endured a continual slow fire of martyrdom from her mother-in-law, aided by a maid who used the most ingenious ways of annoying her. She lost by death her father, her husband, and her daughter. She saw her son turn against her and become more lost to her spirit than he would have been if he had died. Small-pox of a most virulent sort destroyed her beauty and all but took her life. Throughout these hard years she was the victim of one form of disease after another and often seemed at the very verge of dissolution. And yet none of these painful events satisfied her passion for suffering, and she added, of her own accord, strange bodily austerities and bizarre forms of torture to complete the crucifixion of the self.

Her “resurrection” from this state of death and despair came suddenly on July 22nd, 1680, and she found herself raised to a new life. “On this day I was as if in perfect life. I found myself as much elevated above nature as I had before been captive under its load. . . . What I possessed was so simple, so immense, that I cannot express it. It was then, O my God, that I found again in you ineffably all that I had lost. My trouble and pain

<sup>33</sup> M. Masson: Fénelon et Madame Guyon. Documents nouveaux et inédits (Paris, 1907), Lettre XIV.

were changed into a peace which I can only call God-peace.”<sup>34</sup> The human instrument of this new crisis in Madame Guyon’s spiritual experience was Father François La Combe, a native of Thonon, a Barnabite monk and at this period the superior of the Barnabites in his native town, whose life was henceforth to be strangely linked in destiny with hers. He was a man of quite ordinary mental powers and decidedly psychopathic. He had been sensual in his youth and had a period of perverted moral judgment, but he experienced a religious transformation, was profoundly influenced by the mystics whom he had read, and though not over wise and discreet, he became intensely devout.<sup>35</sup> Madame Guyon had already, at an earlier period, been impressed by his devout life and spiritual insight, and now he seemed divinely chosen to explain to her with authority that her state of despair, dryness, and desolation, through which she had just passed, was nevertheless a state of *grace*, and to show her that this was only a necessary round in the ascending spiritual ladder to bring her to the culmination of her mystical experience.

The third and final stage, upon which she now entered, and which was to continue to the end of her life, was, she believed, a state of continuous, perpetual union with God. According to her own account, her “own-self” was dead, her own individual self-consciousness was annulled, and “own-will” and “own-desire” were obliterated. A *God-me*, as she believed, took the place of her old *self-me*, so that her soul “lived in God as we live in the air without being conscious of the air.” An entirely new kind of consciousness, a new type of will, seemed to have come into being through a resurrection-life.

“It was as if everything had disappeared from within me, and a greater power had taken its place. I had indeed experienced in the

<sup>34</sup> Autobiography, Chap. XXVIII.

<sup>35</sup> The story of his life is briefly told in Jean Philipaux, Relation de l’origine, du progrès, et de la condamnation du Quietisme (1732), pp. 1–32.

times preceding my trouble that a more powerful than I conducted me and made me act. I had not then, it seems to me, a will except to submit myself with acquiescence to all he did in me and through me; but here it was no longer the same. I had no more a will to submit; it had, as it were, disappeared, or rather passed into another will. It seemed to me that this powerful and strong One did all that pleased him; and I no more found that soul which he formerly conducted by his crook and his staff with an extreme love. He appeared to me alone, and *as if this soul had given place to him, or, rather had passed into him, henceforth to become only one same thing with him.*<sup>36</sup>

She felt a sense of "infinite freedom," such as no one knows whose will is his own. Her soul rested in a state of absolute quiet.

"Nothing could interrupt me. Tempests made not the smallest alteration in my mind or heart. My central depth was in peace, liberty, largeness indestructible. If I sometimes suffered in my senses owing to continual upsets, *that* did not penetrate; they were only waves breaking on a rock. The central depth was so lost in the will of God that it could neither will nor not will."<sup>37</sup>

There was no strain, no tension, no worry; her soul was in complete *abandon*. She no longer felt any leaning, inclination, or tendency—"my will was empty of all human inclination." Formerly in the first state, God seemed within her; now she seemed rather within Him, submerged in the divine Sea itself, pure, vast, immense. Her intellect, which at first appeared to be lost in a strange stupidity, was

"restored with inconceivable addition.<sup>38</sup> I found there was nothing for which it was not able. . . . I experienced something of the state the apostles were in after having received the Holy Spirit. I knew, I understood, I comprehended, I was capable of everything, and I did not know where I had acquired this intellect, this knowledge, this intelligence, this power, this facility, nor whence it had come to me."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Autobiography, Part I, Chap. XXVIII.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Part II, Chap. VIII.

<sup>38</sup> See experience of T. Story: "He called for my life and I offered it at His footstool; but He gave it me as a prey with unspeakable addition, etc." Story's Journal (1747), p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> Autobiography, Part II, Chap. III.

In this third stage she was subject to extraordinary automatisms; in fact, to such an extent that she felt herself "moved from within" to all the decisions and courses which she took, and thought of herself as only "a passive divine instrument." Ideas, which she believed of divine origin, rose spontaneously out of her "empty consciousness," without any preparation and without any control of will. An interior Light seemed to flood her mind and move her to speak or write or act "beyond her knowing." *Spiritual Torrents*, her most original book, was written at Thonon automatically, by a movement which she could not resist.

"I set myself to write without knowing how, and I found it came to me with a strange impetuosity. What surprised me most was that it flowed from my central depth, and did not pass through my head. I was not yet accustomed to this manner of writing, yet I wrote an entire treatise on the whole interior way, under a comparison of streams and rivers. . . . Before writing, I did not know what I was going to write. As I wrote I found myself relieved."<sup>40</sup>

The most striking feature of this third stage was her consciousness of apostolic mission. It was impressed upon her, revealed to her, that she was a prepared instrument for the propagation of the Spirit, a recipient of special grace in order that she might be the apostle of a church of the Spirit.

"I became aware," she writes, "of a gift of God, which had been communicated to me without my understanding it, namely, the discernment of spirits and the giving to each what was suitable for him. I felt myself suddenly clothed with an apostolic state, and I discerned the state of the souls of the persons who spoke to me, and that with such facility that they were astonished and said one to the other that I gave to each that of which he had need. . . . I felt that what I said came from the fountain-head, and that I was merely the instrument of Him who made me speak."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Autobiography, Part II, Chap. XI. She gives extraordinary instances of business sagacity, which she believes was divinely supplied.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. Part II, Chap. XVII.

In her own graphic phrases, she was endowed with "spiritual fecundity," "spiritual maternity." "I was," she says, with extraordinary boldness, "a participator in all the divine mysteries and I was associated in divine maternity in Jesus Christ. It was this maternity which caused me most suffering, for," she explains, "I can bring forth spiritual children only on the cross." She seemed, in this work of spiritual maternity, to be aware of all the inner conditions of her spiritual children, to be travailing in pain for their birth, and to be enduring all the purgatorial sufferings attaching to their sin or their unfaithfulness, and on occasions it seemed to her as though she was brought into such depths of divine experience that she became a channel, or "canal," through which divine grace, or the fountain of living water, flowed into the souls of those for whom she was travailing, so that "they experienced in themselves an inconceivable plenitude of grace and a greater gift of prayer."<sup>42</sup> This "greater gift of prayer" seemed to her the supreme mark of spiritual attainment, and above all other callings she felt divinely called to the mission of perfecting persons to pray in silence and to receive grace without the mediation of speech or thought. As the soul advances to this highest state, it is able, she declares, to remain in absolute silence before God, while the Word of God operates in the central depth by ineffable speech above all articulation.<sup>43</sup> True prayer is thus a divinely initiated prayer, a prayer which God moves and directs in the soul.

There can, I think, be no doubt that Madame Guyon, in her period of "spiritual fecundity," regarded herself as "sent" to form and construct "an interior church" within the Church and to be the instrument of a far-reaching spiritual reformation.

"It seems to me," she wrote in an extraordinary passage which was suppressed from her *Autobiography*, "that God has chosen me

<sup>42</sup> *Autobiography*, Part II, Chap. XVIII.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* Part II, Chap. XX.

in this age to destroy human reason and to make the wisdom of God prevail on the ruins of human wisdom and of reason. He will establish the cords of His reign through me. His spirit shall be spread over all flesh and my sons and my daughters shall prophesy. It is I, it is I, who shall sing, out of my feebleness and humility, the song of the Lamb. . . . I shall become the corner stone of the interior Church.”<sup>44</sup>

Father La Combe in a letter of August 20th, 1695, written from his prison, tells her that “the little church in this place” is prospering—he had said in a former letter that the Kingdom of God was being established there—and that she, Madame Guyon, is loved and honored by those who compose this interior group and who are in spiritual union with her.<sup>45</sup>

Her period of “spiritual maternity” falls into three temporal divisions. The first division is the La Combe period, the second the Fénelon period, and the third the prison-period of quiet and obscurity. Father La Combe did not write his *Orationis mentalis analysis* (Analysis of Mental Prayer) until 1686, after Madame Guyon had expounded her views, and it would appear that he learned his doctrine of Quietism from her rather than that she learned hers from him.<sup>46</sup> She is throughout the period of their intercourse the dominant personality, though she was always more or less under the hypnotic power of suggestions from him. He could cure her of the most terrible pain or of a racking cough by a single word. They felt themselves completely united in interior life, so that the spirit of the one flowed freely into the spirit of the other, an experience which they called “correspondence,” and they professed to be aware of each other’s states even when widely separated by space. Through-

<sup>44</sup> This strange extract from her Autobiography is printed in Masson’s *Fénelon et Mme. Guyon*, pp. 1-12. It is more boldly prophetic and apocalyptic than my brief quotation would indicate.

<sup>45</sup> Letter XC in “La Correspondance sur l’affaire du Quietisme” in *Les Œuvres de Fénelon*.

<sup>46</sup> He very positively declared that he had no contact with Molinos, either directly or indirectly, nor had he read Molinos’ writings.

out this period, Madame Guyon exhibited striking symptoms of pathological condition and her own accounts very plainly show multiform types of well-known hysterical phenomena. She devoutly believed that she was divinely guided in the most minute details of her movements and her actions, and she saw a marvellous Providence in all the complicated affairs and difficulties that beset her, but the modern reader cannot fail to be impressed by the caprice and unwisdom and indiscretion of much that she did and of much that she brought upon herself in the period of her wanderings and her sufferings and her perpetual "persecutions." But notwithstanding this painful element of mental disorder, which is always in evidence in her life, there is a wonderful and almost amazing spiritual power equally in evidence. She had beyond question in some way found an *immensely expanded interior life, some new dimension of soul.*

It was during this period that she wrote her two most influential books: *Les Torrents Spirituels* (Spiritual Torrents) and *Le Moyen court et très facile de faire Oraison* (The short and easy Method of Prayer).<sup>47</sup> These two little books exhibit rare psychological insight and spiritual grasp. They show unusual literary style and power and they are the classics of seventeenth-century Quietism, though they reveal at the same time the weaknesses and the extravagance of the movement. It is a primary idea of Madame Guyon that there is a "central depth" in the soul, which has come from God and which exhibits "a perpetual proclivity" to return to Him, like the push of the stream back to its source in the sea.<sup>48</sup> All souls would return to their native Source, if they did not encounter the obstacle of sin, and therefore the main problem of life is the healing of the wounds of

<sup>47</sup> These two Treatises are published in her *Opuscules Spirituels* (Cologne, 1704), 2 Vols. She was a very voluminous writer and her complete works fill 40 volumes: *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris, 1789-1791).

<sup>48</sup> See *Torrents*, Chap. I, Secs. 1-3, and IV, Secs. 1-8.

sin. There is, in her opinion, no solution short of the complete annihilation of the individual self in which sin inheres, the absolute spoiling of every particular thing to which the soul clings in its sundered selfhood. The soul must die to everything which it loves for self-sake, even to its desire for states of grace, gifts of the Spirit, supernatural communications, and salvation itself. The soul must get beyond the state of enduring crosses and sufferings because it wants God to see its devotion and its love, and it must learn to love and suffer and be crucified without knowing or asking whether He sees its devotion or whether He cares.<sup>49</sup> The soul must *let itself go* without thinking or willing or desiring. It must even get beyond doing virtuous actions, and reach a height where the *distinction* of actions is annulled.<sup>50</sup> But the soul loses its own powers and capacities only to receive an immense capacity, like that of the river when it reaches the sea. It no longer possesses, it is possessed. It has lost "the nothing" for "the All." It is perfect with the perfection of God, rich with His riches, and it loves with His love. It is one and the same thing with its Source. The divine life becomes entirely natural to it. It moves with the divine moving, acts as He acts through it, and its interior prayer is action.<sup>51</sup>

*Le Moyen court* is a powerful presentation of interior prayer as the heart of religion and of the life of union with God. Here again Madame Guyon has much to say of "the soul's inmost centre," of the profound interior depth of man, of "the native energies" of the soul. Here again also she shows an uncompromising stoical sternness toward everything that is man's "own" nature, everything that is individual, everything that is of the "creature." There must be a withdrawal from any dependence on the round of external forms and practices,

<sup>49</sup> Torrents, Chap. V, Sec. 19.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Chap. IX, 7-8.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. Chap. IV, 2; Chap. IX, 1-8.

from outward attractions and occupations, from all self-satisfaction and self-exertion, from the strain and effort of thought, from the worry and fret of activity, from everything that differentiates into the particular or focusses on the concrete. Peace is attained only when the mind comes back to its primal *simplicity* and leaves all that is distinct and sensible. It is when the mariners rest from the toil of their rowing and let the wind drive their vessel that they reach their desired haven.<sup>52</sup> Pure faith, burning love that seeks no return, an interior silence, in which the soul retreats from everything that can be named or thought and sinks into its central depth, is the way to possess God, who is always present and always at home in this central depth as soon as one reaches it. This silence infused with the presence of God, this prayer which is the energy and fire of love, this hushed enjoyment of God with no straining for gifts or returns, produces a marvellous expansion of life and gives a plenitude of power for spiritual service, for it is now the Spirit Himself, the eternal word of God, that prays and moves and acts within. The soul that has attained this inward peace is not inactive or idle, rather all its powers and its multifarious interests, drawn into a centred unity, are directed by a divine moving principle which can accomplish more in a moment than can be accomplished by a whole life spent in the reiterated acts of self-exertion.

Father La Combe was arrested in the autumn of 1687, committed to the Bastille, and his religious views searchingly examined. He was sent as a prisoner to the island of Oleron and later to the castle of Lourdes. During the early stages of his imprisonment he continued his "interior correspondence" with Madame Guyon and an occasional letter passed between them. His mind, however, gradually gave way under his imprisonment, and confessions which in this mental condition he made of

<sup>52</sup> Moyen court, Chap. XXII.

improper relations with Madame Guyon may well be ignored.<sup>53</sup>

Madame Guyon herself was arrested in January, 1688, and confined in the Convent of St. Marie de la rue St. Antoine. Through the solicitations of Madame de Miramion, who had been much impressed by her piety, Madame de Maintenon became interested in the prisoner and succeeded in securing her liberation after an imprisonment of eight months. She made a very favorable impression on Madame de Maintenon and soon became a powerful influence in the inner spiritual circle of the court, though Louis XIV warned his enthusiastic wife that the lady's "sublime experiences" were "nothing but reveries."<sup>54</sup> It was at this time that Madame Guyon first met with Fénelon, whose future career and destiny were to be profoundly influenced by the crossing of their paths.

François de la Mothe-Fénelon, then Abbé, chaplain and spiritual director, soon to be tutor of the King's grandson and later Archbishop of Cambrai, was thirty-seven years old. He was a fascinating man, gifted with genius, possessed of grace, glowing with enthusiasm, fervent with religious passion, impressionable and credulous, a master of literary style, and eager for the deepest religious experience attainable. An idealist in everything and especially in religion, he was ready to recognize a saint as soon as he saw one in this wicked world, and he was soon convinced that this remarkable woman, with her depths of suffering, was an actual living saint. At the first meeting, however, which took place in the country house of the Duchess of Bethune, the "correspondence" was somewhat one-sided. He did not *fuse* quickly, but rather failed to feel the spell of her spiritual power and

<sup>53</sup> Accusations against the morals of Madame Guyon were very carefully investigated and no sufficient ground was found for thinking that her character was immorally tainted.

<sup>54</sup> Bausset's Life of Fénelon (London, 1810), Vol. I, p. 101.

seemed distinctly cold. There was no question, on the other hand, of the instant effect of the meeting upon her. She saw at once *that this was he!* She had seen him eight years before in a dream and God had given him to her then.<sup>55</sup>

"It seemed to me," she wrote, "that our Lord united him in a most intimate way with me. . . . I felt inwardly, however, that this first interview did not satisfy him and that I was not appreciated (*qu'il ne me goutait pas*). I experienced, on my part, an indescribable drawing to pour my heart into his, but I found from him no correspondence, which made me greatly suffer. . . . After the second meeting the correspondence was more satisfactory but not yet quite free. . . . I suffered eight whole days, after which I found myself united to him without hindrance, and since then our union has gone on increasing in a pure and ineffable manner."<sup>56</sup>

It must be understood that this "ineffable union" is what Madame Guyon calls "spiritual filiation," and this instance of it is the most striking example of her ministrations in "spiritual maternity." She cries in ecstasy, "O my son, you are my well beloved, in whom alone I am pleased," and she declares that there is no limit to her maternal tenderness for him. "I soon found," she continues, "that with an inexpressible joy I could pour my heart into his without seeing him or without talking with him. I felt that there was an almost continual flooding in of God into my soul and a flowing of my soul into his."<sup>57</sup> It is difficult for a modern reader to study this passionate document, which was omitted from her *Autobiography*, or to read the extraordinary group of letters which passed between Madame Guyon and Fénelon during this eventful year, without feeling that there was something more here than "mystical plenitudes" and "ineffable spiritual correspondence." It goes without saying that their intimate relation was free of moral stain. To Fénelon she was a saint, and she

<sup>55</sup> See Fragment of Autobiography, in Masson, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>56</sup> Masson, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. pp. 5-7.

was invested by him with all the authority of a divinely guided prophetess. She always remained to him pure and holy. It was his loyalty to this faith that made him refuse to join in the condemnation of her and that involved his break with the court and the closing of his career. But in her there was unmistakably a neurotic element, which appears in Protean forms in her experiences and in her actions. She revelled in the unrestrained figurative imagery of the "Song of Songs." She was made for love and was restless in her hunger for it, and it must be said too that though she may not have had a distinct consciousness of it, she really enjoyed a glorious conquest. One can pretty plainly see the subtle conquest proceeding in these letters,<sup>58</sup> though the words used are "maternity" and "filiation." There are a great number of passages referring to the union of their souls and of their joy in each other. "There are moments," Madame Guyon writes to him, "when your soul is so near mine that I find no separation between."<sup>59</sup> And again, "My heart is always joined to yours."<sup>60</sup> Fénelon says, "I do not know what you do for others, but I know that you do much for me. I should be overjoyed if I could sit in silence with you;" and she answers, "I find you in God and God in you. The closer I am united to God, the more I find you in Him."<sup>61</sup> "My heart pours itself into yours without difficulty."<sup>62</sup>

Madame Guyon, it must be said, was deeply impressed with the feeling that Fénelon was destined to be a spiritual star of the first magnitude and that God had "great designs" for the restoration of the Church through him,<sup>63</sup> and, further, she carried in her spirit a profound conviction that she was "the canal of communication" through whom the Spirit of God was to flow and by whom He

<sup>58</sup> Letter LII.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. LIII.

<sup>61</sup> Letters XLII and XLIII.

<sup>62</sup> Letter II.

<sup>63</sup> See Biog. Fragment and Letters XXXI and CVIII.

was to prepare His "chosen vessel." "My soul is like a fountain," she tells him, "which pours itself abundantly into the hearts of those who are given to me, until it makes them equal to itself in divine plenitude,"<sup>64</sup> and she says, again and again, that in a special and unusual way she is "a canal" between God and his soul or a suffering sacrifice for his purification. "I consent to be an eternal victim which burns before Him without ceasing for you. I hope you will know one day, either in time or in eternity, what God does by me for you. You will then see a measure of grace and of love that will ravish you."<sup>65</sup>

The supreme mission to which she feels called is the cultivation in him of "pure faith," "pure love," union with God in silent prayer, and the absolute annihilation of "own-self."

"You must accustom yourself to walk by pure faith, which means to walk without *knowing* and without sensible feeling.<sup>66</sup> . . . Do not listen to your reason, or to the reason of your friends, but follow without hesitation the inclination the Saviour gives you.<sup>67</sup> . . . The soul must cease to walk by its own steps and enter the quiet of the Lord.<sup>68</sup> . . . The soul must let itself be *nakedly guided*. . . . Go forward blindly and cease to trust the guidance of reason, even enlightened reason."<sup>69</sup>

Pure love counts no cost, seeks no return, desires nothing, finds perfect joy in self-giving, is indifferent even concerning its salvation or its damnation, ceases to ask about its own perfection, but obeys, gives, sacrifices, loses itself without asking any questions. Pure love loses all thought of any good that belongs to the creature, any thought even of eternity.<sup>70</sup> The soul must be like a feather that moves with the breath of the spirit, or like an arm of a balance in perfect equilibrium and turned by the slightest touch, and without the constraint of preference.<sup>71</sup> "God never says: This is

<sup>64</sup> Letter XXIII.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. XXIX.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. XVI.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. XXIV.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. XXXV.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. XLI.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. III.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. XXXV and XXXVIII.

enough of disinterestedness. The more one gives to God, the more He asks.” The prayer of silence and of union with God is, she explains, a state of perfect *simplicity*. The mind is not occupied with any sensible image or any distinct idea. “All the faculties, all the powers of the mind, must be reduced to a simple unity,”<sup>72</sup> which means a cessation from everything, not only from external things, which are the least of our distractions, but from all action of the mind. “There must not remain one stone upon another that is not cast down. But after this temple built with hands is destroyed, God will raise up another, not built with hands.”<sup>73</sup> The soul that attains this perfect simplicity is beyond the need of means and mediums—“such a soul could live in joy, even though everything were destroyed and all the services of religion were denied it, for it would lack nothing essential.”<sup>74</sup>

For the attainment of this exalted state—“the eternal Sabbath quiet of the soul”—absolutely everything of “self” must perish and go to the wall—“you first die to everything without reservation.”<sup>75</sup> One must go the entire way of self-loss and come to the state of complete abandonment of all that belongs to or attaches to the *me*. God wills to destroy all tendency to self-ownership. There must be no love other than for God, no willing except in parallelism with His will, no desiring except as He awakens it.<sup>76</sup> “God,” Madame Guyon writes, “is so completely the Soul of my soul, the Life of my life, that I have no other soul, no other life, but Him.”<sup>77</sup> And Fénelon tells her that he too is ready to go out, not knowing, not desiring to know, whither or how: “I feel the hand of God breaking all the branches on which my spirit seeks to cling, and plunging me into the dark abyss of pure abandonment.”<sup>78</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Letter VII.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. XXI.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. XI.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. XX.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. III.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. L.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. XLVII.

Throughout this intense correspondence, Fénelon appears for the most part cautious and self-restrained. He wrote to Madame Guyon: "Take care that you do not go too fast, and that you do not take your own impulses for divine moving. Do not neglect necessary precaution."<sup>79</sup> He was plainly impressed by Madame Guyon's spiritual experience and by her knowledge of interior states. He looked upon her as an adept who, out of her abundance, was giving him light and guidance, and he afterwards employed many expressions and ideas from her letters to him, but he never quite cut his cables and let go of reason and judgment, and he never felt comfortable about the rigor of her extreme demands. Much which she wrote did not appeal to his taste, and he did not even read her *Autobiography*—that "temperature chart" of her inner life, as Viscount St. Cyres has called it,<sup>80</sup> though she strongly urged him to do so.

In 1693–4 the impending storm broke, and all intercourse between Fénelon and the great prophetess came forever to an end, though Fénelon's faith in her inspiration and his loyalty to the central truth of her message involved him in a conflict which shook all France and which drove him into permanent banishment from the court. Madame Guyon herself, after being examined for six months by Bossuet, was imprisoned in Vincennes, in Vaugirard, and in the Bastille. She was liberated from her final prison in the Bastille in 1703 and passed her remaining years in a quiet retreat at Blois, dying in 1717. Our last glimpse of her shows her patient, resigned, full of faith and love and forgiveness, believing still that her inner being was joined to God and that God was preparing "a little church of saints" through the method of simple faith and interior prayer.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Letter CXIV.

<sup>80</sup> Viscount St. Cyres' François Fénelon (London, 1901), p. 129.

<sup>81</sup> See Delacroix, Étude sur le mysticisme (Paris, 1908), p. 196.

We cannot follow in detail the stormy controversy which ensued between Bossuet and Fénelon, at that period the two most distinguished churchmen in France. The “new mysticism” seemed to Bossuet to supersede or even to abolish organized established Christianity. He sweepingly condemned *pure faith* (“la foi confuse”) i.e. faith which was without content and which focussed upon no object, either outer or inner, and which the Quietists were putting in the place of the definite ideas of Christianity and the positive articles of Christian doctrine. He wholly disapproved of “disinterested love,” which loves without request or expectation, which is willing to forego even salvation and which substitutes a permanent inner state of beatitude for specific desires. He, further, condemned the substitution of orison—silent prayer operated in the soul by God—for the definite acts and efforts and practices approved by the Church.<sup>82</sup> There were other reasons, of a less sincere and noble sort, actuating the great churchman in his battle royal against Quietism, but there can be no doubt that, unmystical as he was in temperament and hostile as he was to enthusiasm, he honestly conceived Quietism to be a dangerous substitute for real Christianity.

Fénelon might easily have allowed the storm to rage against the prophetess of the movement and he might have escaped its fury, if he had joined in signing her condemnation. This he would not do. He told Madame de Maintenon, who was never again to be his friend, and others in high places, that he found it impossible to condemn a person whom he believed to be both innocent and holy. He bravely wrote:

“I ought to be better acquainted with the real sentiments of Madame Guyon than all these who have examined her to condemn her; for to me she has disclosed herself with more confidence than she did to them. I have rigorously scrutinized her, and I have gone

<sup>82</sup> Bossuet's *États d'Oraison*.

too far to recede from her now," though, he frankly adds, "I never had any predilection either for her or for her writings. . . . It seemed to me that she was naturally prone to exaggeration and without sufficient precaution."<sup>83</sup>

The full violence of the gathering storm burst when Fénelon — then Archbishop of Cambrai — published his *Maxims of the Saints of the Inner Life*.<sup>84</sup> The modern reader finds it difficult to comprehend the immense stir which this little book created in those far-off days of war and diplomacy and fashion, but for a time nobody talked of anything else. The king ordered Fénelon to leave Versailles, and all the influence of this most Christian king was brought into play to secure in the Vatican the condemnation of the "Maxims."

It must, however, be admitted that the "Maxims" was an unwise book for the occasion and an extreme expression of quietistic mysticism for any age, though it is possible for the present-day reader to realize that Fénelon was aiming at a lofty and genuine type of inward religion. The deep and ineradicable difficulty with this entire formulation of the spiritual life is its inability to get out of the dark region of negation into the real world of concrete experience and moral action. "Pure contemplation," he says, "is negative. It is not occupied with any sensible image nor with any distinct idea of God."<sup>85</sup> Sanctification is the attainment of the state of holy indifference, of absolute non-desire.<sup>86</sup> The highest state of prayer is absolute passivity, complete repose, in which thinking, feeling, willing, are obliterated. The apex of human life is reached in a state of perfect *simplicity*, when the mind is focussed upon no object, when the will aims at no goal and when the soul does not like one thing better than another thing, but is as a

<sup>83</sup> Letter CII in "Correspondance sur l'affaire du Quietisme." *Oeuvres de Fénelon*, Tome IX. See also Bausset's Life of Fénelon, Vol. I, pp. 134-147.

<sup>84</sup> *Explication des Maxims des Saints sur la Vie intérieure* (1697).

<sup>85</sup> *Maxims*, Chap. XXVII.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* Chaps. V and VI.

feather blown by the wind of grace. Love is then first pure love when it loves no particular thing or object, when it loves for the sheer sake of loving and asks for no return.

Beneath all this numbing negation and glorifying of the abstract, there throbs, however, everywhere through the book the real passion of this exalted soul for union of heart with God, for a re-living of the Christ-Life and for positive coöperation with the Spirit, inwardly experienced. He was earnestly endeavoring to wash selfishness and self-seeking out of religion, to show how to avoid the eager strain and over-busy activity that characterize Christian people, and to emphasize the truth that God would become the supreme factor of our lives if we could only learn how to keep ourselves in the currents of His Life instead of across them.

The extraordinary insight of Fénelon, however, and the rare sanity of his spiritual counsel appear at their best in his *Spiritual Letters*. His power of psychological analysis of states and conditions, and his frank way of telling the distinguished women who consulted him, the laws of physical and spiritual health, are remarkable for that age and would be for any age. "No peace is to be looked for," he tells one of his correspondents, "so long as we are at the mercy of greedy, insatiable longings, trying to satisfy that 'me' of ours which is touchy over everything that concerns it"—so long as we nurse "a sickly self-love which cannot be touched without screaming."<sup>87</sup> There must be, he insists, a relentless and deadly war with this cruel enemy of our peace, our own *self*. There must be no softness, no truce, until this enemy is annihilated. "The more absolute the self-renunciation, the deeper the peace."<sup>88</sup>

He is very keen to detect the signs of morbid temperament and the illusions which haunt a soul that is a prey

<sup>87</sup> Letter XXVIII.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

to over-fine scruples. "You are too skillful in tormenting yourself about nothing," he tells one of his consultants. "You dry up the sources of prayer under the pretext of hunting out infinitesimal faults. You distract and perplex yourself with your self-investigations. You indulge in anxious search after trifling faults which you magnify in your imagination."<sup>89</sup> To such souls he prescribes relaxation of strain and striving, the healing rest of silent prayer, the realization of the continual presence of God, and absolute confidence in the love of God: "Trust to love; it takes all, but it gives all."<sup>90</sup> He finds his letter-writers too restless and active in their religious life, too eager for the attainment of inner states, and too anxious for a religious reputation. The wise advice is, "Try to soothe yourself in silence before God, as the mother soothes the child that is sobbing on her knees."<sup>91</sup> Get absorbed in the love of God, follow your heart in its deepest leadings, and you will be less eager to please men and so will really please them more.<sup>92</sup>

He is always telling his correspondents, who want to get out of the world in order to lead the saintly life, that this expectation is a delusion. Saintliness is not to be sought in some world apart from pain and care and annoyances; it is to be found, if anywhere, in the midst of daily duties, in this world where we must eat and drink and clothe ourselves, where we must get on with imperfect neighbors, and be subject to disappointments and defeats. God is everywhere within reach. One can practise His presence even while eating or dressing, and Love is more eager to bestow itself than we are to receive it. "God is often hidden behind disturbing conditions." "He is beside us amid daily annoyances."<sup>93</sup> He counsels another correspondent to stop useless reflections on the past,

<sup>89</sup> Letter XXXVII.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. XXXV.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. XV.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. XXXI.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. VI.

whether of regret or of complacency, to avoid unprofitable brooding, and to form, by act of will, the habit of practising the presence of God in the midst of necessary occupations.<sup>94</sup>

What he advised his friends he practised in his own life, first during the strain and agony of separation from his old circle of friends, of bitter attack and of condemnation by the official Church, later during the heavy burdens of administering the complicated affairs of a difficult diocese, and finally in the supreme sorrow of his life, over the death of his beloved pupil, the Duke of Burgundy, grandson of the king, who seemed to Fénelon the one hope of the France of the future.

Fénelon exhibited a strange mingling of the man of the world and the saint, the rational thinker and the Quietist absorbed in God, the ambitious churchman and the lover of the crucifying cross of Christ, the persecutor of heretics and the gentle apostle of soul-freedom, the ingenious casuist and the sincere spirit who would not at any cost desert the woman who had convinced him that she was a holy person. He is one of the noblest illustrations in the seventeenth century of the impossibility of successfully solving the problem of spiritual life on the assumption that human nature—the natural man—is absolutely corrupt and depraved, and that God can triumph in the soul only when the human powers have been annihilated, the assumption that God is all only when man is nothing. Fénelon himself has put this condition in striking fashion: “As the sacristan at the end of the service snuffs out the altar candles one after another, so must grace put out our natural life, and as his extinguisher, ill-applied, leaves behind it a guttering spark that melts the wax, so will it be with us if one single spark of natural life remains.”<sup>95</sup> That condition underlies all the vagaries and mistakes of Quietism, and it presents, wherever it

<sup>94</sup> Letter CXXXIII.

<sup>95</sup> Spiritual Letter, No. CCIII.

appears, an *impasse* in the way of the spiritual life. If ever two souls have passionately tried to go that hard road, have ever attained the enduring, stoical-christian temper, have ever been ready to crucify "the me," and have ever been eager to have God all and themselves nothing, it was these two French Quietists of the seventeenth century—Madame Guyon and Francois Fénelon; but nothing is more clear than that they succeeded in so far as they retained and ennobled their concrete personalities and their interesting individual characteristics, and that they failed in so far as they suppressed and annihilated themselves and arrived at abstract love, non-desire, and no-willing.

The entire movement—certainly one of the most extraordinary Odysseys of the inner world ever undertaken by man—was a bold venture of the soul to find a direct way from the failure and ruin of the finite self to complete recovery through union with the Infinite. Whether consciously or unconsciously, it was an attempt to do away with priests and mediators, to find salvation in its purest and loftiest degree without a single external help, to prove that the only realities in the universe that count are God and the soul, and that they are so near that they can become one. Most of the great Quietists reviewed here were Roman Catholics, but, perhaps without knowing it, they were at heart as much protestant as Luther. They were striving, often through most intense suffering, to put the key to all spiritual attainments into the hand of the individual and to inaugurate by a new and living way the invisible church of the Spirit. It is a strange story, a Pilgrim's Progress toward a real city of God, but a story full of bafflement and tragedy as well as of noble, high-spirited endeavor.

The main actors themselves, with all their sincerity and honesty of purpose, were sometimes lacking in plain, ordinary wisdom. They blundered. But it must be

admitted that it was a very difficult world of men and women for such a quest as theirs, and it was easy in that world of society to blunder. They were hampered too, seriously hampered by the limitations of their psychological theories and by their theological ideas which came to them out of the past. They had to work with views which they thought were true. They took for granted that man was a capital ruin, that the "creature" was devoid of any good. It was therefore their problem to find a way to bridge an unbridgeable chasm. How could grace operate in this human realm of utter depravity? The Church answered, Through the miracle of the sacraments. They answered, The soul can by one act of concentration withdraw from everything that is of the "creature," can centre down below all thoughts, desires, and feelings and come back to its pure origin in God. It can live henceforth in such a union with God that He acts in all the soul's actions, He loves in all its love, He is the Life of all its life. What they could not succeed in doing, however, was to make this "discovery" of theirs *work* here in this practical world. It was so far in to the "centre" of meeting, it was so deep down below all consciousness and the experience was so completely negative and devoid of content, that the individual could bring back nothing in its hands to show for its solitary journey. Quietism needed the warm and tender objective realities of the Gospel as filling for its abstract and empty fervor. It lacked some concrete way of turning its moments of fecundity into the permanent stuff of moral character and ethical endeavor. It was a noble *mood*, but it was too rare and abstract to be translated into real human life.